2: Campbell B,E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

be more or less primitive. The couples can be constructed in two slightly different ways depending on the intended height of the roof. In very windy districts near the sea very low, semi-circular roofs that do not catch much wind are used. The roof is streamlined and there is no comb along the roof, pl. XLV: 2.

This roof is made in the following way. Very strong couples rest on the walls and are joined by two crossbeams, the lower called *faradh* and the upper *maide mullaigh*. These joining beams are just as strong as the couples themselves. They are joined to the couples by means of one or two wooden pegs on each side. The couples never meet. Above this arrangement are the purlins, *taobháin*. Transversally across these are slender laths called *cleitheáin*, pl. XLV: 1.

High roofs with combs are supported by couples joined in pairs and held together at the top by a wooden peg, *pionna*. The ridge beam, *maide droma*, rests on the hollows formed at the junctions of the couples, and parallel to it but lying transversally on the couples are purlins, *tobháin*, on each side of which run the whole length of the roof. To brace the couples there are tiebeams, *maidi snaidhm*, pl. XLIV.

On this foundation of roofing sticks are spread tough sods of grass, the earthen side inwards. The sods cut from the ground can either be made about 5 ft. long and 2 ft. wide or a bit longer than the side of the roof and about 3 ft. broad. In the former case the sods overlap, the higher over the lower. In the latter case the sods stretch from the wall to the ridge and are bent over the ridge. Over the ridge then there are two layers of sods. In both cases the one row of sods overlaps the second row beside it. I have found the short sods used in Southern Ireland, and the long ones in Donegal.

The thatch is put on in two ways. One method of thatching corresponds to the thatched houses of the European continent viz: the scollop-thatching or rod-thatching, pl. XLVI: 2. The other method is the hay-rope or *sugán* thatching known from the border of the North Atlantic and the North Sea. The scollop-thatching is made in such a way that straw, *tuighe*, or mountain grass, *fineán*, is fastened to the sods by means of horizontal rows of rods, *scolb*. The rods are fastened to the underlying sods by twigs, *bannai*. Both *scolb* and *bannai* are of hazel or sally. Oat, wheat, or barley straw is used for thatching but on the western seabord rye straw is used. Rye is considered most durable. According to scollop-thatching the thatching of the ridge is of certain interest. Here and round the chimney-shaft but seldom at the thatch of eaves, *bun tsop*, a kind of ornament can be formed by the twigs and scollops. But this is an ornament caused by the necessity of fastening and

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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243 survivals, associated with the cutting of the last sheaf—the "churn" or the "Cailleach" (Chapter 19).

Corn stacks are more varied in shape than haystacks and need better protection from weather and from vermin. [824] Sprigs of apple-mint (*M. arvensis*) may be thrown through the sheaves to keep away mice. The stone stack-stands or staddels, called "hovels," are a picturesque feature of the stackyard in some districts. With their steep tops rising above the house clusters, the golden corn stacks turn the little Irish villages into African kraals, or in the fields one may count as many as 30 round stacks in a row, rising against the sky up the hillside. Then the whole countryside seems fuller than usual. New colours and odours meet one on all sides, and the horses as they pass give off the sharp smell which comes from crunching the fresh oats. The country smiths used to make a small light fork or "pike," fitted with a long handle, for throwing the last sheaves high up (Fig. 66). The stacks are thatched with rushes, twisted into bundles known as "stapples" which are pushed into the straw.

[285]
[415]

Fig. 54.

241 We cannot touch on the methods of harvesting and stacking the other cereal crops, wheat, barley and rye, but a word must be said in conclusion on the last harvest of the year—the root crops. Although turnips and the new sugar beet are important in some areas, it is the potato crop which means most to the peasant. All available hands are in the fields, gathering the precious food-supply into wicker baskets or boxes (Figs. 54 and 55); and the school children are given

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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 243 412 [284]

length of flax, or an eel skin. The methods of attaching the hanging to the hand-stave and souple vary, as will be seen from a random selection of drawings (Fig. 72). The joint

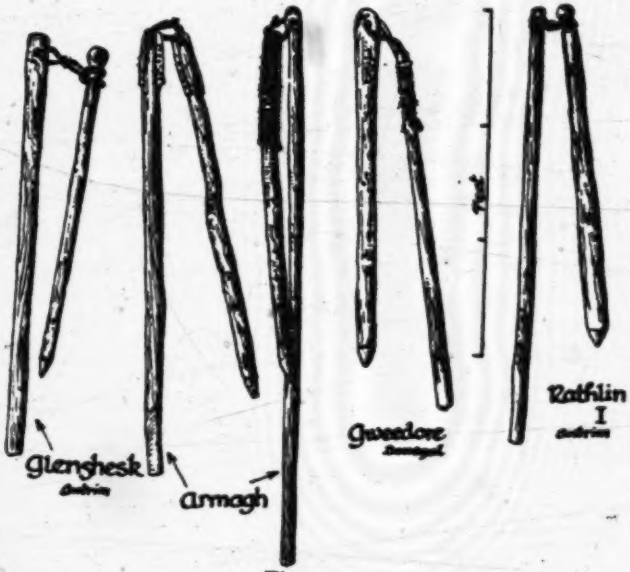

Fig. 72.

shown in the Armagh flail (left), resembles a common English style, but it occurs as far west as Galway. Varied too, are the proportions between the component parts and the methods of swinging the flail. Thus in Antrim the souple is flung round the head while in Donegal it is kept to the side of the body. On fine days the thrashing may take place out of doors, but the usual place is " between doors " in the barn or even in the kitchen, for the opposite doors create a draught which carries away the dust. A besom of heather or of dried kale flower-stalks keeps the barn floor clean. [824]

One of the most interesting and varied and probably one of the oldest crafts practised by countryfolk is the making of 285

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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baskets, and of creels and other objects of wickerwork. To do the subject justice would require a large volume, and we must confine ourselves to some broad aspects. We have referred to creels and kishes of various kinds in Chapter 12. These are objects which the countryman makes for himself, as distinct from the "fancy" basket work which is generally in the hands of special families. To take the creels first, they are constructed bottom-upwards in the same way as the framework of the Boyne curragh, by sticking the stout standards in the earth as though to make wattles and bending them over to form the foundation of the bottom. Strong black sally, hazel or rowan are employed instead of the soft basket willows. The standards are left projecting above the rim of the creel when it is finished, so that the sides do not lift off. But a well woven "mouth" is also necessary to prevent slipping: it may be made single or double. Both creels and kishes may have windows in the sides (Chapter 12 and Fig. 58), an ornamental feature also found in the old wicker cradles. Creels and kishes may be loosely or tightly woven according to whether they are intended for turf or manure. Openwork creels are made in Co. Antrim by pegging the side rods into the two corner standards at intervals of about 4 inches. The old custom in Donegal is to repair two old creels and make two new ones each year. (*See Plate V.*)

Lobster-pots (Chapter 16), stock-pots, fruit and fish hampers, are made on a perforated wooden frame which may be regarded as a substitute for the earth, but most of the

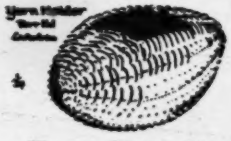

Fig. 73. Length 19".

"fancy work" is undertaken by specialized basket makers, and we can do no more than indicate the variety and skill of their products. There are certain localities where the tradition of basket-making is strong, for instance the shores of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Fig. 80.

Fig. 81.

rectangular examples containing four nest-holes in two storeys are found in some districts, for example in Co. Longford. Though not easy to describe, the construction is quite simple once a start has been made. The finished objects have the appearance of being coiled. While some may have been made in this way, any that I have examined or watched under construction are plaited. The first stage is to twist a long sugán and double it into a two-ply rope, inserting between each third twist a small handful of straw known as a "tate." For the second row the tates are folded forward and plaited, the third rope being provided by the combined ends of the last tate. Handfuls of straw are inserted at regular intervals during the process, and the plaiting goes on until the desired shape and size are reached. The effect is shown in the hen-nest (Fig. 79). Straw collars for horses are made in a different way: some consist of two-ply ropes sown together with twine, but the type used with the Glens' slide-car is simpler (Plate IV).

Ropes of many kinds were in steady demand for tethering and spancelling, and it was the custom to prepare a good supply during the winter. Rushes were also used for the purpose, and they still meet a number of other needs such as bedding, thatching and flax-tying, apart from their old uses for toys, baskets, floor beds, rushlights and the ceremonial crosses to be discussed in Chapter 17. For making ropes the rushes were cut in late summer and beetled with a maul (or "mell"), then broken and twisted by hand so as to get rid of the pith. Dried in the sun and tied in bundles, they were stored until the dark days of winter, when they were fashioned into burden ropes and binnen-ropes (Chapters 9 & 12). The rushes were twisted by hand, first as single ropes, then in two ply: finally an eye was made at one end, and this end was strengthened by threading through another length of rope so as to make a plait. Spancels of rush rope were used to tie together the front legs of kicking cows, and horses were prevented from straying at nights by similar treatment. "Langles" and "burochs," tying together the side and the hind legs respectively, were other methods of hobbling. Straw ropes were commonly employed instead of rush ropes for hobbling,

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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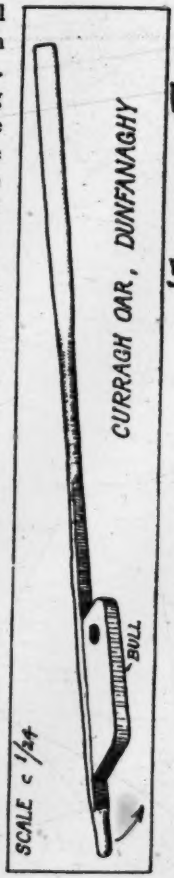
netting in sea and lake and for poaching. And in this connexion one may whisper that the illegal eel-spear (Fig. 94), the leister or salmon spear, and the trout net (Fig. 96)[1] will sometimes be shown to the discreet inquirer. Old garden forks and shovels are often fashioned into spears by the smith. Resinous bog-fir sometimes provided the torches for "burning the river" in salmon-poaching. Much might be said of these dark practices, but this is not the place to give away all the secrets of the countryside. We may properly refer to the huge "legitimate" catches of eels in weirs such as those of "the fishy fruitful Bann."

The well-known curraghs of the Boyne and the west coast have recently been described in James Hornell's book, "British Coracles and Irish Curraghs," but details of rowing and sailing craft of all kinds should be recorded and sketched before regional types give way, as they are slowly doing, to standardised boats. It is probably not too much to say that every coastal county, every large river and lake, has its own traditional styles of vessels, and their comparative study would be an important contribution to science. Some of the small oval curraghs of the Boyne are still covered with cow-hide, but tarred canvas has taken its place in the larger sea-going curraghs of the west coast. These display many interesting variations according to local conditions and custom, but all, with the exception of the paddle curraghs of Tory Island, are fitted with single thole pins on which the oars swivel, the wooden pin passing through a hole in the heavy "bool" of the oar (Fig. 99). This curious device is employed also on some river and lake boats (e.g., the Corrib, the Shannon and Lough Neagh) and was until recent years found on the fishing boats of the Scotch Quarter at Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. I have no information on the distribution of the single thole-pin oar outside Ireland, except that Mr. Hornell has reported (in a letter) that the method is used in the Sudan on the Nile. It is true of such ethnographical studies

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 150 -- ANALYST]

[1] Similar poaching nets were made in the Hebrides—and probably also in Ireland—of heather stems and even sedge roots (*Carex flacca*).



[416]

501

Fig. 99.

[824]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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788 offending person. Similar stones have been used to work
823 beneficent magic in the case of expectant mothers. Here the
778 symbolism may be that of the child in the womb, but there are other cases where it is obviously phallic. Sympathetic magic would appear to be the explanation of another custom, that of carrying away in a cloth and making into various concoctions, some of which were drunk, the earth from the
[755] grave of a holy man. The drink was regarded as a cure for human sins or for disease in cattle.

829 The megaliths themselves are known to have been held in
776 veneration as givers of fertility and curative agents. The
[778] same virtues attach to certain solitary stones, for instance some holy wells have "healing stones" which are used to touch the affected parts of the body. Standing stones with a perforation ("holed-stones") are said to have been used in sealing marriage contracts. Megaliths are also considered the haunts of fairies, which, some students affirm, are to be regarded as ancestral spirits inhabiting the burial places and awaiting an opportunity to be born again. Alternatively it is thought that belief in fairies is a folk memory of ancient peoples of small stature. It is hardly necessary to say that belief in fairies is firmly held in many parts of the country: I have seen quite recently boys dressed in girls' clothes as a protection against fairy theft, for the "wee people" are liable to exchange their "changelings" for healthy boys—a
[165] belief which is perhaps an attempt to explain the high mortality of male as compared with female children.

764 It has more than once been my experience to be refused
[797] permission to excavate megalithic monuments from the owner's belief that bad luck would follow. Country people will not touch the trees that grow on ancient burial sites, for instance they will not even use fallen branches as fuel. This reluctance to interfere with the abodes of the dead provides a charitable explanation of the neglect from which many Christian burial grounds suffer. Incidentally it is worth
[824] remarking that archæologists have often shown by their discoveries that hazel wood and hazel nuts played a consider-

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

able part in the ceremonies of megalithic burial: we remember the significance attached to hazel nuts in the Hallowe'en games of divination (Chapter 17).

The ancient raths or forths, earthen enclosures around old homesteads, are also favourite haunts of fairies, and many are the tales of mysterious happenings in their neighbourhood at night, and of signs of habitation and sweet music issuing from them. Protection from fairies is believed to be obtained by possession of a black-hafted knife, while oatmeal or oat-cakes are also specifics against their malign influence. From fairies as from witches the supreme hour of peril to mortals is at the eves of Beltane, Midsummer and All Hallows. Cattle afflicted with disease were believed to be "elf-shot"—the belief is not entirely dead—and flint arrowheads were produced as proof of the attack. The cure was to give the affected animal a drink of the water in which the arrow had been placed. Among other archæological relics the polished stone axes of the Neolithic and Bronze ages are known as thunderbolts and are accredited with healing powers, and the small spinning-whorls are termed fairy mill-stones. As Arthur Mitchell writes of Scotland: "It is believed that stone celts assist the birth of children; that they increase the milk of cows; that they cure the diseases of the eye; that they protect the houses in which they are kept from lightning; and that they have many other such marvellous virtues. It is believed that, as they have a sort of supernatural origin, they may reasonably be supposed to have supernatural powers."

When food is taken out of doors it is a common belief that some must be left behind for the fairies, otherwise the dreaded "hungry grass" will grow; and the countryman will often spill a portion of his drink as a perhaps unconscious libation to the wee folk. Their activities are peculiarly dangerous to cattle and to butter-making. Among the charms designed to secure a good supply of butter in the churn we find the use of a horse-shoe, of a rusty nail from a coffin or the hand of a corpse, of rowan branches, salt, a live turf, or a cross made of VERONICA leaves.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

776 veronica leaves. In the North it is considered unlucky for a
789 person to enter a house where churning is taking place without
[777] "giving a brash," that is lending a hand at the churn-staff. In the words of a countryman in the west, "Queer things do happen to butter." Fairy tales are full of cattle and cattle-stealing: so are the epic tales. Writers of last century tell of cows that might be seen "with rags about their horns as a charm against the gentry," or gentle-folk, a name often applied to the fairies.

824 This brings us to the fairy or gentry thorns, skeaghs, or lone bushes, that is the solitary whitethorn trees which are regarded with dread. These trees, which must be counted by the thousand, are said "never to have been planted but to have grown of their own accord." They may be found on ancient monuments or alongside holy wells but the great majority are scattered through the fields, and it is worthy of notice that the cult is at least as strong in the Protestant north-east as in other parts of the country. A venerable thorn, pink-flowering, stands under my window as I write and casts its shadow into the Senate Room of the University. But no one will remove it or even lop its branches, and the story goes that when the buildings were being erected the plans had to be changed in order that the thorn should not be interfered with. If a lone tree surrounded by half a dozen scientific departments has claimed such respect it can be imagined in what awe the country thorns are held! See Tailpiece.

It has recently been suggested that the veneration of thorn trees was a Belgic custom introduced to Ireland some 2,000 years ago, but it seems more likely that as with sacred stones and wells we should look even further away in time and space to Mediterranean origins and regard the cult of trees as part of the nature worship connected with man's first use of the Irish soil. Certain thorns dedicated to Irish saints figure also
[764] in ceremonies of burial: when funerals pass by they halt and stones are placed beside the thorn until they have become cairns. Wayside cairns, in the form of memorial monuments,

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Wayside cairns in the form of memorial monuments 824
line the roads to the graveyards of Aran. On thorns at cross roads it is the custom in Co. Wexford to hang small crosses, [211]
made of coffin wood, as the funeral procession passes by. [764]

We cannot deal at any length with the superstitious practices which cling so tenaciously to death and burial: 764
they recall the customs of many other regions, such as Brittany, where the old megalithic cult was strong and seems to have lived on in obsessions about death and accompanying notions of re-birth. The anxiety to be buried with relatives reminds us of the strength of the blood-tie, and " bestows even on death a feeling of social interest." It is an Irish belief that the dead live on in the graveyard, and that the last person buried acts as servant to the others, a belief which not long ago led to disputes as to which of two bodies to be buried should be interred first. There are certain old graveyards where women only are said to be buried, and no living woman will enter them. On Innishmurray there are separate [766]
graveyards for men and women. Unbaptised infants were generally interred in special burial grounds, some of which appear to be prehistoric cairns. There is no need to add to the many accounts that have been written of the keening of the dead and of wakes. In connexion with wakes we need only refer to the tricks, pastimes and games which were their accompaniment. The dramatic games were known under such titles as " The Walls of Troy," " Short Castle," " Building the Ship," " Turning the Spit," " Selling the Pig," " Building the Fort," " The Horse Fair," " The Mock Marriage " and " Shuffle the Brogue." While some seem to have been for amusement only, in others it is difficult not to see sex-symbolism and fertility-rites. In recent times the wake-games [786]
have often degenerated into licence and drinking. Maria Edgeworth tells us that " more matches were made at wakes than at weddings."

When going to a funeral it was customary, in parts of the west until the beginning of the present century, to carry some salt in the pocket in order to avert evil influences. Arensberg quotes the belief that " there is never a funeral but the other

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

000 sea monsters, with animals both wild and tame, with red hair, physical deformities and so on, nor the wealth of folk-lore and folk tales which the Irish Folklore Commission is rescuing from every barony in the country. A beginning has been made in the immense task of sorting out, mapping and interpreting these beliefs. One would like to know the distribution of many persistent customs and practices, for this is the best guide to their origin and significance. How far south, for instance, does the typical Ulster greeting on 576 the road extend—that slow silent half-negative sideways nod of the head? Some day it may be possible, as I wrote five years ago, "to interpret the subtle differences between one region and another which make up the attractive variety of rural Ireland and provide sources of friendly rivalry and rich humour."[1]

• 824

A Fairy Thorn

[1] *Irish Naturalists' Journal*, July 1935.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

homespun, buttoned up the back, and reaching well below the knees, until they reach the age of ten or eleven years. The dyes for the homespuns are obtained from plants growing on the islands; the orange used for stockings being got from a lichen (*Ramalina scopulorum*); black and brown from the purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*); blue from a small cruciferous plant; and red usually from imported madder, but sometimes from water-lily roots. Alum is used as mordant.

5. *Dwellings.*—A house consists of a kitchen, and one or two bedrooms; and it is, as a rule, built of dry stones without any mortar, though this is used afterwards for stopping chinks, and plastering the walls internally. Most of the houses are not whitewashed, with the exception of a belt around the small windows, but lime-washed houses are becoming more common than formerly. The house has two doors, front and back, both opening directly into the kitchen; and the windows are situated only on the front of the house; they are of very small size, and seldom made to open; yet, often, small as they are, they are nearly filled up, so as to leave only from six inches to a foot square of glazed surface. The chimneys and fireplaces are of the usual type found throughout the rural districts of Ireland, except that in some cases the chimney, after rising perpendicularly nearly to the top of the wall, turns outwards and opens as a square hole in the gable. The roof is straw thatch, laid on over "scraws" of grass turf, and held down by a net-work of sougans (straw ropes), to the ends of which heavy stones or long pieces of timber are attached. The gable of the house is stepped, so that the thatch when laid on does not project over the end wall, and is sealed down, to prevent water getting under it at this part, by a plastering of clay.[1] The thatch is put on fresh every year, a new layer being laid over the older ones, until the lowermost layer is thoroughly saturated with smoke, and quite rotten, when the whole is stripped off and used as manure. The floor is of beaten clay in the kitchen, but the bedrooms are sometimes boarded. The most expensive material used in building a house is wood, which is very scarce, and is usually obtained from drift wood, washed up after a storm, in which way large beams often reach the islands. It is owing to this scarcity of material, and the people having to build their own houses, that there are so few outbuildings or cattle-sheds, and that the dwelling-houses are so small. The furniture is scanty, and testifies to the poverty of the people. A few

[1] "Houses thatched in this manner are called on the west coast *tighthe croithte*, i. e. 'shaken houses,' in contrast to the *tighthe fuaighte* 'stitched houses,' in which the thatch is tied on by ropes or cords."—REV. E. O'GROWNEY.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

291 the town, where they sit down by the roadside, and put on their boots and stockings, taking them off again when starting for home.

The old-fashioned frock or kilt-shaped garment, made of red or grey homespun, and buttoned up the back, is still worn by boys up to twelve years of age.

The dress of the women is on the whole less changed than that of the men. Many of the elderly women wear the white-frilled cap, others have a small red kerchief tied under the chin. Over the shoulders a shawl of tartan or other striking pattern is folded, but this is not so frequently of a bright red, as in other districts, as the darker colours seem to be more in favour; beneath the shawl is a boddice of some dark material. The petticoat is short, but is only occasionally the typical red homespun of the western peasant. It is often grey, or dyed purple, blue, or some other bright colour, and is sometimes ornamented by a few rows of black braid. Aprons of check are much worn. Many of the older women wear the heavy blue cloak with cape and hood on Sundays and holidays. The younger women to a large extent copy modern fashions on festive occasions, but the result is not happy, as their taste in colours is curious, and they certainly look better in native costume.

286 A great variety of homespuns are made in the district, there being several weavers who turn out coarse flannel, tweeds, and friezes, some of which are very good specimens of hand-loom work. The dyes 386 are nearly all imported, indigo and the made-up aniline dyes being most used. Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), which was at one [824] time pretty generally employed for this purpose, is now only used for dying stockings.

5. *Dwellings.*—The habitations of the people present considerable 342 variety, some being extremely poor, others of a fairly good class. The description given below applies solely to the houses of the people of the rural parts, and not to Belmullet (which is a cleanly and well-built little town, composed almost entirely of good-slated houses of two stories) nor to the houses of the proprietors or large holders.

Of late years there has been much improvement in the style of dwelling, but few indeed of the old turf cabins remain; while the semi-subterranean huts, some of which were inhabited in 1841, have become altogether extinct.

The *Parliamentary Gazetteer* (1846) describes the majority of dwellings as being built partly of stone and partly of turf, and consisting of only one or at most two rooms.

An average dwelling now is built of stone, sometimes dry, at others

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

II

FROM FOREST TO FARMLAND

THE tools and traits we are describing in this book have persisted through the centuries because of their close adaptation to the Irish environment, physical and social. They have gathered around them, in that environment, associations of usage and ritual without which they are meaningless, so that transplanted into another land they would be museum-pieces, as indeed they are rapidly becoming in many parts of Ireland. To understand them, therefore, we should consider them not in isolation but as part and parcel of a particular environment. To a large extent a culture owes its specific peculiarities to its geographical setting, and that is why our first chapters will be concerned with the face of the land and with the fields, farms and houses in which generations of Irish countryfolk have lived and worked.

It was from a forest environment that the cultural landscape slowly emerged. The destruction of the native forests was virtually complete by the seventeenth century. Thereafter constructional timber had to be imported, and the rural population turned to the fossil oak and pine of the bogs. In the eighteenth century landlords planted their lowland demesnes with exotic species of trees, but only in our own day, under government schemes of reafforestation, are the hill lands here and there being planted and abandoned fields being put back into forest. With the passing of the oak forests a wealth of woodcraft and tree lore perished and a wide range of skills declined, of which we get tantalizing glimpses from archaeological discoveries and legendary tales. Instead of the almost unbroken forest cover which once existed a 'closed association' of farms and fenced fields

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

137 [824] now stretches from coast to coast. So much of the scene is fashioned by man that it requires an effort of the imagination as well as the findings of scientific research to picture the landscape as it was before his coming. Palaeo-botanists, from their studies of plant-remains and pollen-grains preserved in the peats (Chapter XIV), are slowly reconstructing the post-glacial succession of forests as arctic willow, birch, hazel, pine, alder and oak spread in turn over the face of the land. The dwarf vegetation of the early post-glacial period, with its scattered birchwoods, was too thin to form peat, but with the warmer climate of the Boreal phase (beginning about 7000 B.C.) pine and hazel, followed by oak and elm, spread across the country, and both fen-peat and wood-peat began to form in the undrained hollows of the lowlands. The growth of forest and peats was accelerated as the warm seas of the succeeding Atlantic period flooded the coasts at a time of rising sea-level, between 5000 and 2500 B.C. During this phase the alder flourished and the high humidity brought the rapid growth of sphagnum moss on the bogs.

It was during the following sub-Boreal period (2500–500 B.C.) that the Irish forests reached their greatest development, covering even the exposed seaward slopes of the western mountains where today not a single tree can be found growing. During this period, among the thinning forests of rocky hillslopes, man made his first clearings for cultivation and turned the mountain winds to profit in drying and harvesting his crops.

133 Thus the distribution of mountain masses gives a clue to the nuclear regions of Irish civilization, though it should be noticed that there are parts of the Central Lowland where thin dry gravel or limestone soils gave a more kindly foothold. As compared with the broad upland masses of Great Britain, the mountains of Ireland are broken into many fragments which lie scattered around the coasts. They fall, however, into four major divisions which are broadly distinguished by age and structure: those of the north (Ulster) the west (Connacht) the south-west (Munster) and the south-east (Leinster) (Fig. 2).

Geologically the northern mountains are of immense antiquity, and rocks younger than the coal-measures, apart from the ubiquitous glacial deposits, are everywhere rare except in

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIG. 14. Detail of scollop thatch, Co. Armagh, showing roof construction, sods and mud coping (after R. H. Buchanan).

hipped. The best work is seen on houses of the jamb-wall type.

824 342 Oat-straw, despite its poor lasting qualities, is employed for thatching in some districts, because it is the only available material. Being pliable it is widely used for patching. In the old days outfield straw was preferred for thatching because it was tougher than that grown on the infield. Wheat or rye is much more durable than oat straw and rye is specially grown for its straw in parts of Donegal, where I have known flax also cultivated to provide thatching material. Reeds are fairly commonly employed in the south-west and locally elsewhere if no straw is available. I have seen heather used in north Donegal, and in other areas marram grass, rushes and 'mountain grass' (probably *molinea*). The expert thatcher prefers his straw to be cut with a sickle and thrashed by hand and he scorns machine-thrashed straw. Best of all is straw from which the corn has been removed by hand-scutching or 'lashing' over a stick or stone, the 'barrel' of the straw being thus unbroken (Chapter XV).

[241]

342 Nowadays a thatched roof is becoming a mark of sophistication,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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241
[412]

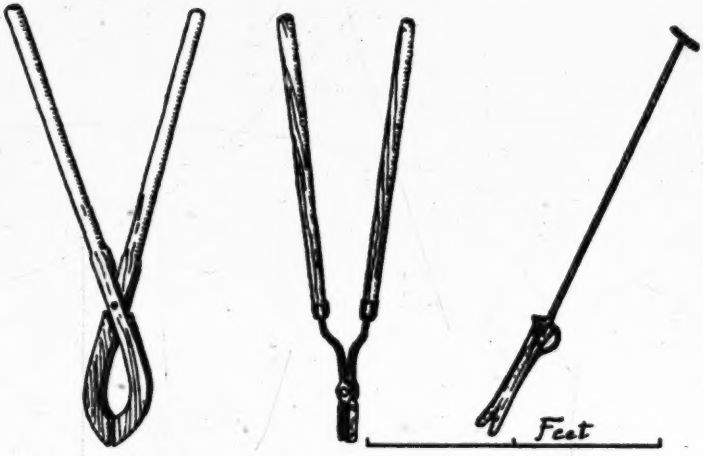

FIG. 50. Weeding 'clips', Antrim and Armagh, and iron dock-lifter, Antrim.

Midsummer festival was an easy way of showing the spirits of the corn what was expected of them. You might also hope to transfer ill-luck to someone else's crop by burying a dead animal, [787] a piece of meat, or even an egg on his land. It would be worth while listening for the call of the cuckoo on the first day of July, for to hear it was a sign of a good harvest. Prognostications were so many and so easily procured that they apparently provided a fatalistic society with a ready means of avoiding steady work. In some parts of the country, docks, thistles and ● [824] couch grass were apparently regarded as a good sign, because they kept the crop warm.[1]

[1] W. Bence Jones, *A Life's Work in Ireland*, 87.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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463 326 survivors of these wandering folk are the tinkers, sworn enemies of the farmers but useful in many ways to the farmers' wives. Though miscalled gypsies they are of native Irish stock and have little, if any, Romany blood. Numbering between 5,000 and 6,000 but declining, they now find little scope for their traditional skill as white smiths but subsist mainly on collecting scrap metal and dealing in horses. Down to recent times their [273] services were in demand for making and repairing the stills in which home-made whiskey (poteen) was manufactured. [554] Weavers and tailors as well as tinkers were despised by farming folk as 'travellers', whereas the smith was held in high esteem.

463 178 Most of the home industries depended on wood and other plant products, natural or cultivated, and on the skin and hair of animals. Nearly all these crafts are now dead or dying and their products, perishable by nature, are either gone or fast disappearing. A few skills live on, others survive in children's pastimes or in the memories of old people. The unwritten lore of [824] the countryside included a vast store of information on all the [825] varied trees, plants and animals, birds and fishes which in times past played their part in the lives of the people. Nearly every [861] species had its practical, medicinal or magical uses, and through careful observation, empirical knowledge and a wealth of poetic fancy, a vivid interest in the world of nature was maintained and passed on from one generation to another. Much of this lore has been lost with the decline of the Gaelic tongue and the spread of formal education and book-learning. The [871] country school must conform to a clerk-breeding curriculum designed to meet urban demands. The destruction of woodland and the debasement of standards of living which followed the adoption of the alien potato and the consequent famines had serious consequences on home crafts. Then mass-produced goods came to drive out many products which depended on a discriminating knowledge of local materials. Thus barbed wire has taken the place of its rustic prototype—a hay-rope strung with thorns—and binder-twine has killed a dozen varieties of home-made ropes and thongs. The economist might think of them as bonds tethering rural communities to the soil, but to the sociologist they imply spiritual as well as physical links with mother earth.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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243 789 is worth noticing that symbols in the form of a swastika, but including also circles, pentagrams and horses, were formerly cut as protective devices in the beams of barns in Scandinavia. Some of the designs are reminiscent of the art of the Bronze Age.

243 An Irish verse giving the four essentials of a good thrashing, collected in Co. Armagh, runs in translation:

[539]

A hand-staff of holly,
A souple of hazel,
A single sheaf,
And a clean floor.

This is where the besom of heather or bent comes in: it is still preferred to the sweeping-broom for a clay floor or to get into the joins of boards or cobbles. Thrashing was a daily job, carried out on well-run farms night and morning before the cattle were fed. It was held that the cattle throve best on freshly thrashed oats, and the storage of grain would anyhow have been difficult where there were no barns.[1] For this reason, too, the level 'street' in front of the house, or even the public road was often the most suitable floor available. The thrashing was usually done on a strong linen sheet. Publicity as well as a steady echoing beat seem to have been the desired aims. Every-
[555] where prestige has attached to a noisy thrashing, and partly no doubt for self-aggrandisement a solitary thrasher would beat with his feet to make the noise of two. Everywhere too the
[539] sound of the flail has been turned into jingles and rustic rhymes. They did not accompany the work itself because it was too noisy and too exhausting to allow talking or singing. The flails' beaters made their own merry music; was it, one wonders, originally intended to drive away evil spirits from the precious food supply?

222 824 In this chapter we have confined ourselves to some of the things that were made at home out of materials that lay to hand. To describe the utilization of all the lesser plants that have

[343] [1]Mr. A. T. Lucas, however, has described traditional outdoor granaries, now restricted to west Cork, constructed of thick straw ropes, which when completed resemble round stacks (*Gwerin*, I (1956), 2–20). Mr. V. B. Proudfoot calls my attention to the similar 'corn bykes' of Caithness (*P.S.A.S.* (1932), 136–7).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

figured in the economy of the farm or in medicinal and magical lore would be an almost endless task. One recalls that a group of Californian Indians practising a food-gathering economy is said to have made use of 176 species of wild plants for satisfying almost all their needs. A few examples of the survival of a collecting culture in Ireland may be given, taken from various sources such as Wood-Martin's pioneer work, but also from folk-memory. From the roots of ferns were extracted oils used in weaving, from those of the water lily, a cherished red dye, a substance for tanning from tormentil roots, and ink from the roots of flags (saggins). Bracken and wood ash were kept for making soap, and the ashes of thistles were the perquisite of the herdsmen. Large lake rushes provided materials for caulking boats and churns, and phragmites stems for winding yarn in the shuttle. Lady's bedstraw besides being rubbed on bee-skeps to attract a swarm, produced both dye and rennet. For cures we have the carrageen or Irish moss as well as the moss growing on crosses and other special stones, and a great number of flowers and herbs. Yarrow, in Irish, is called 'the herb of the seven cures'. But the sovereign remedy was the essence of all wild flowers contained in what was euphemistically known as 'all-flower water', i.e., cow's urine.[1] We shall return to these topics in Chapter XXI.

[1] W. G. Wood-Martin, *The Elder Faiths*, 2, 183.

Note. Mr. A. T. Lucas has recently published accounts of hurling balls made of cowhair (see *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 57, 99–104; 59, 78–81).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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XIX

FIXED FESTIVALS

THE great fairs, patterns and pilgrimages were attended by people who travelled considerable distances and included strange folk from the outside world, 'beyond the mountain men'. It was partly for this reason that they earned a reputation for lawlessness, especially where 'the gatherings' had outlived their original purpose and their real business had become subordinate to pleasure. A Nottingham Goose Fair or a Marlborough Mop Fair may still be conducted with propriety, but in Ireland they would probably have become Donnybrooks. Having little opportunity for regular social contacts as compared with the villagers of the ploughlands, a pastoral people makes the most of the periodic pauses in the cycle of the seasons.

For climatic reasons these great gatherings have been largely confined to the summer half-year between May and November. The winter festivals have been more local, involving the family and the townland rather than rival groups from different parishes and baronies. The feast days of both St. Briget and St. Patrick fall in early spring and their associations are more intimate and have more local colour than those of the saints of high summer such as St. John the Baptist. But the entire round of the year is liberally sprinkled with days of festival, and if we begin with St. Briget it is not merely because she was Irish-born but because her feast marks the beginning of the pastoral year. The blessed Bridie was a cowherd and is therefore associated with cattle and with such flowers as the dandelion—the Plant of Bride—yielding a milky juice which was believed to nourish the young lambs in spring. St. Briget's Feast was very popular and many superstitious practices, more or less

FIXED FESTIVALS

527 776 It was popularly believed that the saint wandered through the countryside on the eve of her feast day. Bread was left on the doorstep, and in some districts it was the custom to prepare a small bed of rushes or birch twigs and place it by the fire so that Bridie might come in and rest. Sometimes the last sheaf of harvest was used for the purpose. In south-western Ireland a [532] doll made of straw—or decorated churn-staff—was carried [292] from house to house by 'Biddy Boys', wearing straw masks such as are used by mummers and by strawboys at weddings, and singing songs in honour of the saint. They would solicit [264] gifts and end the day in jollification. The evening was celebrated by a supper of pancakes taken from a plate laid on a rush cross, [787] and as on the other quarter-days prognostications were made. A ribbon or piece of cloth exposed on St. Briget's Eve became [789] endowed with curative powers. It was believed that no work which involved the turning of a wheel should take place on the saint's day. The placing of a periwinkle in each corner of the kitchen likewise hints at a remote pre-agricultural origin for the festival, but it came to be associated with the pastoral promise of spring, of warmth, new grass, lambs and milk. It is said that the saint placed her foot in water on her feast day so that on that day it begins to warm up each year.

St. Patrick is credited with carrying the process a stage further by putting a stone in the water, or alternatively 'turning [805] up the warm side of the stone'. 17th March marks the end of winter and the starting-point of work in the fields. The country- [221] man likes to have his first ridge of potatoes planted on that day, and he is not greatly moved by the patriotic celebrations which are anyhow more in evidence in New York and Boston than in Ireland. Traditionally the cult of St. Patrick is strongest in Ulster, where hundreds of churches and holy wells are named in his honour, and according to legend he was reluctantly accepted as patron saint in some of the other Irish regions. They say in [191] Ulster that Connachtmen speak with husky accents because their forebears stole and ate St. Patrick's goat. Like Columbkille, Patrick is remembered for his curses as well as his prophecies, ● [824] for instance he cursed the rushes that pricked him when he rested, so that every green rush has a brown tip.

527 To refer to all the associations of the movable feasts of

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIXED FESTIVALS

527 The May Festival, the Gaelic Beltane, remained almost untouched by Christianity, and an astonishingly rich growth of magic beliefs and superstitious customs accumulated around it. They were concerned with the safety of the familiar things which supported life, and especially the milk cows whose 'whitemeats' were to provide the main food-supply until harvest came round once more. It was a matter of pride to have a last formal dish of stirabout on May Day, 'for if they can hold out so well with bread they can do well enough . . . for then milk becomes plenty, and butter, new cheese, and curds and shamrocks are the food of the meaner sort all this season'.[1] It was considered [431] most unlucky and unwise to give away salt, water or fire on May Day lest the luck and 'profit' of the farm went with the gifts. Witches and fairies were unusually active at this time, and [776] many tales are told of the wiles they adopted to outwit the unwary and gain admission to house or byre to do their mischief. It was a wise precaution to pour milk on the threshold, or at the roots of a fairy thorn, and the many protective charms against the stealing of cattle and milk were augmented by others special to the occasion. 'On May Eve the peasantry used to drive all their cattle into old raths and forts thought to be much frequented by the fairies, bleed them, taste their blood, and pour the remainder on the earth'.[2] It was said that the ghosts of cattle that had been lost could be seen in such places.

527 Portents, prognostications and protection were sought in the familiar flowers of field and hedgerow, in the weeds and shrubs ● 824 which had followed in man's footsteps and were associated with 751 his secular struggle for survival, especially in those that carried the promise of butter in their golden cups and a free flow of milk in their bounteous white blossom. May flowers, primroses and gorse gathered before sunrise were scattered on the threshold of the house and garlands of 'Summer', as the flowers were called, were hung on the doorposts and even tied to the cows' tails. In the Antrim Glens the mayflowers were crushed to provide a juice with which the cows' udders were washed, and elsewhere buttercups were used for the purpose. Cow dung, if less hygienic, had similar protective power, presumably in

[1] Sir Henry Piers, *West-Meath*, 121.
[2] *U.J.A.* 3 (1855), 165.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

the belief that it contained the essence of the flowers of the fields. Sprigs of rowan were stuck in the midden, placed over the door of the byre and hung on the cows' horns. Flowers were also put around the well, for it was supposed that a milk-thief could steal your summer's milk and butter by skimming the water at this time, or by dragging a rope across a field to collect the dew. Boundary streams were also potent in this connexion, and I was told in Donegal that the milk churn had to be washed on May Day in 'three landlords' waters', that is the meeting place of three properties.

Besides these family rites there were public ceremonies, the lighting of bonfires and parades of May Babies, of May Boys and the May Queen. One of the rhymes sung by May Boys in the west of Ireland runs, in translation:

> Summer! Summer! the milk of the heifers,
> And ourselves brought the summer with us,
> The yellow summer, and the white daisy,
> And ourselves brought the summer with us.[1]

The May Baby parades link the festival with the fertility of the family as well as the fields. I give an account of the ceremonies as described in Co. Louth in the early nineteenth century: 'On May Day, the figure of a female is made up, fixed upon a short pole and dressed in a fantastic manner, with flowers, ribbons, etc. This figure they call "The May Baby" . . . Around this figure a man and woman (generally his wife) of the humble class, dressed also fantastically with straw, etc., dance to the sound of a fiddle and entertain the people with indecent shows and postures . . . These exhibitions cause great merriment among the assembled populace; women who have had no children to their husbands also attend to see this figure and performance, which they imagine will promote fruitfulness in them, and cause them to have children.'[2]

The May Day bonfires and the May Queens are now little more than children's games and excuses for begging. The burning of bones—whence the word bonfire, which in Ireland keeps its original pronunciation—and in particular of horses'

[1] Lady Wilde, *The Dublin University Magazine* (1849), 541–60.
[2] J. Donaldson, *Upper Fews in 1838*, 70.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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527 bones, were formerly considered proper to the occasion. There
[372] were dances round the fires, performed with great dexterity and precision by youths armed with cudgels. The May-pole,
[177] however, and the May-bush observances seem to go with areas
●[824] of strong English influence and do not seem to have been generally adopted by the Irish, perhaps because May-trees, which are not given this name in Ireland, are likely to be fairy thorns and therefore should not be damaged. The May Eve assemblies are thus described in eighteenth century Kilkenny: 'Bloody battles and much confusion and uproar is the mischief that follows from the barbarous and unheeded custom of collecting *May-balls* among the new-married folks . . . The hedges and fences, in the outlets of our city, are stripped of full-grown hawthorns, whose late blooming pride and fragrancy is now miserably dying away on dunghills before cabin doors, by way of *May-bushes*, no longer, alas! to afford a nuptial bed to the new-married linnet and his mate, but fastened in the ground for the vilest purpose—to hang filthy clouts upon'.[1] The gold and white balls which were hung on maypoles have been regarded as symbols of sun and moon—or it may be of butter and milk. Another May Day custom was the licence allowed
[786] young boys to run about stinging people with nettles, a privilege which in my youth in Shropshire was permitted only on 29th May, the victims being those who did not wear an oak-apple.

527 If the May Day fires are now more in evidence in the back streets
372 of Belfast than on the high hills, the Midsummer fires still burn strongly in some country districts and their pagan flames have not been so easily quenched. I saw dozens of them in Co. Galway on Midsummer Eve in 1956, mostly at country cross-roads. Old men in Donegal have told me that they remembered the time when they had counted from their hilltop fire nearly a hundred others. Young men would show their mettle by jumping to and fro through the flames, and girls by doing so hoped to marry early and have many children. We recall that
[789] leaping is in folk tradition a widely approved method of making the crops grow high, and the fires, it is conjectured, were meant to encourage the sun, now at its turning point, to shine on through the harvest. Midsummer was a time when evil influ-

[1] *Finn's Leinster Journal* (4th May, 1768).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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ences affecting human beings and the animals and crops were usually potent. It is remembered that 'the oldest woman in the town' would go round the fire three times on her knees, reciting prayers. To walk three times sunwise round the fire was to ensure a year without sickness, and as the flames died down the cattle were driven through the embers and their backs were singed with a lighted hazel wand: the sticks were preserved and utilized for driving the cows. By tradition everyone carried home a burning stick from the fire, and whoever was first to take it into the house brought the good luck of the year with him. A glowing turf from the fire was carried three times sunwise round the dwelling house, and others were thrown into the growing crops. Yarrow was hung in the house to ward off illness. Fernseed was gathered for its magic powers and divinations made from the roots of bracken and lilies. We have already noticed the custom of retaining some of the ashes from the Midsummer fires to mix with the following season's seed corn.

The third fire-festival of the year is associated with St. Peter's Eve on 28th June, but I have not come across many traditions of St. Peter's bonfires except in Armagh and Wexford: it may thus be mainly restricted to areas where English influence was strong. More widespread and better known, because they have been caught up in many patterns and in such popular pilgrimages as that to Croagh Patrick, are the celebrations of Lammas, originally 1st August, now held on Lammas Sunday, the last in July, which is also known as Garland, Bilberry or Height Sunday. This marked the end of summer and the beginning of harvest: it was a first-fruits festival into which the alien potato has been fitted, and no potatoes were dug before this time. Offerings of flowers and fruits were made at holy wells, and in some places cattle were made to swim through streams and loughs into which lumps of fresh butter had been cast:[1] 'They think no beast will live the whole year through unless they be thus drenched'.[2] In hilly districts Height Sunday is observed by climbing to a recognized picnic place where bilberries are gathered and games and dancing were formerly enjoyed. In Co. Down a large prehistoric

[1]Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 1, 282.
[2]Sir Henry Piers, *West-Meath*, 121.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

in Europe, and the emphasis on different elements of the complex naturally varies with regional circumstances and traditions. In Ireland the trees which the elder faiths had endowed with magic qualities were all small trees and shrubs—especially the rowan, holly, elderberry and whitethorn—and the evidence of archaeology and palaeobotany is that these plants first became common in the prehistoric landscape as weeds of cultivation following forest clearance by early cultivators. Thus they would have become symbols of the farming year, their white blossoms a sign of spring and the end of killing frosts, their red berries a token of the fulfilment of harvest and the promise of renewed life. At first sight one may wonder why the thorn tree should have been singled out for special attention, for it is ubiquitous in the lowland landscapes. The hedgerow thorns, of course, are newcomers, and they may be hacked with impunity, but woe betide the man who damages a fairy thorn, that is one not planted by man but growing on its own in the fields or on some ancient cairn or rath. They are to be found in every part of Ireland, but to see the fairy thorn in full majesty one should go to the naked hillsides where it stands in splendid isolation against the stone dykes and the bare hills (Fig. 89). As with the sacred groves of China, not even fallen dead branches which would serve as firewood should be removed. I have

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823
824

FIG. 89. Fairy thorns. A cluster of 'gentle bushes' near Slieve Gullion, Co. Armagh: 'If you were in there on the hottest day it would starve you.'

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

824 known instances when a branch accidentally broken from a fairy thorn was carefully tied back in position.

797 312 778 The policy of the Church was to attach new myths to old rites, but only occasionally has the thorn tree been nominally won over to Christianity by dedication to local saints or by its association with sacred sites, with wells or Lammas celebrations, as for example the Criocan Thorn in the heart of Slieve Bloom.[1] On the other hand well-worship has had less stubborn roots, and 'holy water' has been more readily absorbed into Christian ritual. Nearly all the holy wells have close associations with the saints. Over 3,000 examples have been listed, most of them now half forgotten, others visited in secret and a declining number openly resorted to for cures. It is not difficult to understand the universal attraction of a spring of pure water. In the eyes of countryfolk a sense of mystery attaches to the upwelling of a spring well: it is considered lucky to have access to such a source of domestic water—a true 'well', not a hole bored in the ground—and one is invariably told that the local well yields the purest water for miles around, or even 'in all Ireland'. The attributes of purification, healing and fertility are natural concomitants of the magic welling of spring water, but besides possessing supernatural powers of this kind the holy wells are regarded as having had miraculous origins. The most famous sites where patterns are held have already been mentioned: the local holy well is rather an ever-present source of healing resorted to in need. One cannot but think of an ancient cult of waters springing from deep sources in primitive religion which was reinforced and adapted by successive intrusive cultures from the megalithic to the Christian (Pl. 16).

312 778 788 The ritual of 'paying rounds' at a well frequently involves associated stones and trees. A sunwise circuit of the well is made and the pilgrim, after taking a drink from the well, hangs a rag or a rosary on an adjacent bush. The ritual commonly includes also tracing with a pebble on a stone of the well-covering the mark of a cross which has been incised by countless other pebbles. This practice has a bearing on the mysterious cup-marked stones and basin-stones (bullauns) which are associated with numerous ritual sites, including wells, for I

[1] V. Cornish, *Historic Thorn Trees in the British Isles*, 53.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

perfect sphere the rounded igneous pebbles which are selected for the purpose. One wonders whether some of the many cup-marked stones which turn up in the fields in certain districts—I have seen many in Inishowen in Donegal—were used for shaping stones, such as the sling-stones with which champion slingers, of whom the legendary Cuchulainn was one, performed their feats. The sling and the sling-rod were originally hunting weapons and probably instruments of war, and one of the last refuges of slinging as a pastime was the now vanished Claddagh, the fishing suburb of Galway, where a man was not reckoned a good shot until he could strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen.[1]

Where a holy well has dried up—the usual explanation is that it was desecrated and moved its position—the sanctity of the site may be transferred to a tree. The so-called pin-well at Arboe in Co. Tyrone is a beech tree, hirsute with pins and nails, growing in the burying ground on a Celtic monastic site. A rag-well at Clonmel is visited by mountain farmers who hang rag offerings on briars at lambing and calving times, and afterwards place more rags appropriate in number to the increase obtained.[2] There is on the island of Inishmurray a wind-well which has the power of controlling the wind, the ritual being to empty the well to produce a calm. Sticks and stones also figure in wind-raising ceremonies, and 'the rude stone image of Inniskea' (Inishkea in Co. Mayo), which was dressed up in flannel each New Year's Day, had powers of producing either storm or calm.[3] Powerful magic was worked by a wooden statue of St. Macdara, formerly kept in his chapel—an oratory of early type with projecting *antae*—on an island dedicated to the saint in the extreme south-western corner of Co. Galway. Sailors passing the island dipped their sails three times in honour of the image, but we are left to guess what superstitions were involved from the statement that about the year 1640 'the bishop of Tuam caused it to be buried for weighty reasons'.[4]

[1] *U.J.A.*, 2 (1854), 164.
[2] *Béaloideas*, 15 (1945), 284.
[3] C. Otway, *Erris and Tyrawly*, 107.
[4] C. R. Browne, *Carna and Mweenish*.

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date)1910-12
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

824 753 757 824 [752] 824 [777 789]

Plants.—The "hungry grass" grows on mountains, and, if trodden on, causes a sickening hunger which kills if not relieved. I knew a man in County Limerick who said he "knew it to happen to another man" on the Clare hills, and the victim got food in bare time to save him.[30] Seven stripe of a plantain leaf stop the bleeding of a bad wound. The "Seven Sisters" plant for healing purposes must be picked at a particular period of the sun and moon in August. Fern "dust" (seeds) heals cuts from rushes; the dock charms nettle stings; and the four-leafed shamrock brings luck if found accidentally. The belief that house-leek preserves a house from burning[31] is widespread in north and east Clare. The pennywort has a sectarian bias, and only cures Protestants,[32] and this is connected near Bunratty with a curious legend of Anne Boleyn. This hapless queen, after enjoying by means of the plant the greatest influence over her terrible spouse,[33] "got into trouble, but, when she was sent to jail, she couldn't get the plant, and they hanged her." The rowan, or mountain ash, is a luck-bringer and preservative from magic, and I remember small forked twigs being carried. A rowan, planted at Iniscaltra about 890 by King Cormac mac Cuileanan, bore apples.[34] Moss from a skull, or an ancient cross such as that at Dysert O'Dea, or a pillar, is curative; the moss at Fortanne well was used for the eyes, but had to be replaced. If you see a "button mushroom" you should pluck it, as "it will never grow any more once it is looked at."[35]

THOS. J. WESTROPP.

(*To be continued.*)

[P. 252]

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

241 soil covered. There was little "field-making" at the beginning of this century, and
[731] few plots south of the terrace crest were utilized for farming. Fields on the terraces were planted yearly with potatoes and other vegetables, but in the 1920s the "eelworm" parasite invaded the island and forced the present custom of
[659] fallowing plots for at least four years. This development necessitated the creation of new fields at the back, and when the government began to subsidize field making during the 1930s, and fence construction later on, another impetus to the manu-
[114] facture of additional land was provided. Most of the literature pertaining to Inis Beag, influenced by nativism and primitivism, claims that field and fence building has proceeded for centuries (even millennia) and disavows the existence of indigenous soils.

221 The year in Inis Beag commences in February with the advent of spring,
222 when seaweed is gathered, fields are manufactured, and crops are planted. Although
241 some seaweed is collected in the summer and autumn and stored in "cocks" near the shore or in outbuildings for later use, most of it is cut and pulled in January
[133] and February at the time of spring tides. There is a maximum 15¾ feet difference between flood and ebb spring tides in Inis Beag, and normally submerged reefs rich in seaweed are bared three to four hours daily for two or three days twice each month. The men await a "good strand" to gather seaweed, when the tide is lowest during the daylight hours and not influenced by wave or swell action, for this is a dangerous task which sometimes demands wading in water thigh deep. The folk are amused greatly by a sequence from a noted film about them depicting a woman carrying seaweed along the coast during a raging storm; the footage was created by the producer to satisfy esthetic canons and to portray the primitive and Celtic virtues.

241 The generic term for natural fertilizers is "manure" and includes seaweed, compost, and guano. The islanders also use chemical fertilizers to some extent, particularly in areas where soils are deficient in manganese. Compost varies much in composition and may include human and animal feces, called "dung," turf ashes, and decaying vegetable matter, such as ferns and the sod "scraws" of thatched roofs
[514] being dismantled. Nowhere in the literature is the use of human manure mentioned, and the folk are extremely secretive about its use, as they also are about burning cow dung for fuel in times of emergency. Their reticence about disclos-
[654] ing these practices is a product of sexual puritanism. Young farmers are more willing than their elders to follow the advice of the Department of Agriculture agent stationed in a neighboring island, and are coming to use chemical fertilizers more commonly than was the case in the past. The islanders eschew artificial commodities which impinge on the human body, and often I have heard chemical fertilizers denounced because they supposedly are manufactured from "bones of evil persons buried in cemeteries" on the Continent, or victims of the plague centuries ago. Some farmers hold artificial fertilizers to blame for both the potato blight and the eelworm parasite.

• 824 Four kinds of seaweed are utilized by the folk: ribbon weed, string weed or sea thong, red or May weed, and black weed or bladder wrack. The most commonly used variety is red weed, once the major source of kelp, which is washed in
[437] the year around and is stripped of its leaves when collected. Its stems are known

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as "sea rods" and are accumulated by several islanders, dried, and shipped by small boat in May or June to a factory on the mainland to be processed for their iodine content. One man received 90 pounds for his sea rods in the spring of 1960. Ribbon and black weed usually are cut at the time of planting and are carried immediately to the fields, while the other two types are pulled throughout the year and stacked along the coast or in outbuildings. The most effective seaweed fertilizer is black weed, because its "sap" permeates the soil most rapidly; but it and string weed are in short supply in Inis Beag and are most available to Terrace villagers.

Any landowner can collect seaweed on the strand and along the shore bordering the western part of the common land. So much red weed washed ashore on the easily accessible beach during December of 1959 that men from all four villages gathered it during the Christmas season, when work usually is at a standstill. Along the rest of the Inis Beag coast, areas for seaweed collecting are assigned to each village and to every family holding land within the community. Low Village gathers along the west sound, although a short strip of shoreline is assigned to High; Castle and High have collection rights along the eastern portion of the common land, and they also gather from the Atlantic coast near the ends of the roads leading from their respective communities; and, Terrace obtains its seaweed along the east sound, except for areas near the lighthouse assigned to Castle families. Long ago, a portion of the Quarter of the Castle was assigned to the Quarter of the Lake, but the traditional seaweed rights near the lighthouse were maintained.

On days suited for seaweed collecting, the coastline of Inis Beag is alive with moving forms during the several hours that the tide has ebbed. Men wade out on the bared reefs to cut or pull plants, which they pile in woven sally rod baskets, called "creels," and carry to horses and asses tethered on the paths above "high water mark." Sometimes a man will lead his ass to the edge of the water and load it directly, if footing is secure, and he may be aided in the task of carrying creels by his wife and children. The weed then is transported to the fields and dried on the fences or placed directly on the "gardens;" weed which has been stored from the previous year also is spread on the plots, sometimes several weeks before seeding takes place. There is a wide difference of opinion among farmers as to whether or not seaweed should be put down dry, and, if spread, how long it should be exposed to rain before "rotting" dispels the "juices." The same differences of opinion mark the evaluation of the efficacy of various fertilizers and their use at the several stages of "setting" a garden.

One of the tasks of the agricultural agent is to test soils and advise farmers as to which kinds of seaweed and other fertilizers are best suited for their land. But he seldom is consulted, and if his advice is sought, it is more often than not disregarded. Family and village traditions still guide farming procedures to a great extent, and experimentation is a rarity. Terrace Village farmers employ all four types of seaweed, in part because it is a village custom, but also because they have access to most of the string and black weed in the island. This practice is lauded by the agent as being scientifically the most effective; however, he takes no credit for the Terrace idiosyncracy. Among other important duties performed by

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with him while fishing or be brought his dinner and afternoon lunch in the field. Infants and young children are fed milk at various times, and the youth often eat biscuits, candy, or bread spread with sugar between the five regular meals.

Most women bake their own bread in "pot ovens" suspended over the open fire, with ingredients purchased in the shops, but some buy bakery bread which is delivered from the mainland once a week. Women with many offspring must bake bread daily, since as many as five loaves will be eaten in a day by a family of eight. Cream is saved from the milk and turned into butter in locally made churns every few days, to provide the pound or more of butter consumed in a week by each member of the family. A few women purchase shop butter and also margarine for cooking, but the latter is not used on the table (despite the fact that it is one-third the price of imported butter), because it is an artificial product and thus thought to lack food value. Both chicken and duck eggs are eaten, and some persons prefer hard to soft boiled eggs. Men insist on drinking their tea from large mugs and prefer their bread sliced thick and spread generously with butter. Telling of a tea that he attended in Dublin, a man complained of teacups the size of egg cups and bread cut so thin that "you could see houses on the mainland through it." Children are more prone than adults to use jam on their bread, and a large jar of imported jam will last but a day in a household containing six children.

Few families can afford to serve meat daily, and sometimes several days will pass before meat appears on the table. Among the meats eaten are lamb, mutton, chicken, and fish procured locally, and rasher and sausage bought in the shops; however, some families have beef and lamb shipped directly to them from mainland shops weekly. Meats usually are boiled, even fish, and soup and gravy are made from the liquids formed. Although lobsters, crabs, snails, and other shelled sea creatures are obtained by the folk, they are exported, used for bait, or cast aside rather than eaten. Two kinds of seaweed are included in the diet and are considered delicacies: *creannach*, which can be consumed raw as it is pulled but more commonly is boiled and dried before being eaten, and *carraigín*, which when cooked with milk makes a tasty blancmange. These seaweeds are believed to promote health and are used as folk medicines by some islanders, who regard them as having a magical potency.

The potatoes grown in Inis Beag are considered outstanding in taste, even when compared with those grown on the mainland. They are boiled in a "cooking pot" over the open hearth; this container is deeper and has a rounder bottom than its pot oven counterpart. At one time, it was customary to drain potatoes and eat them from a round, flat, short-sided basket woven from sally rods, called a *ciseog*. They still are drained with the basket in many households, but I have observed only three families eating communally from a *ciseog* atop the table. This is thought to be a "backward" custom, and a film producer earned the wrath of the folk by portraying this trait in his work; actually, it did not appear in the film, nor did other sequences, such as a women suckling a pig in time of drought, which the islanders claim that the producer included to brand them "savages." Potatoes when eaten are "stabbed" with a fork, peeled with a knife, and eaten with the

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November 1st. Imbolc heralded the coming of spring with the lactation of ewes, while at Beltaine cattle were driven to open grazing after passing between bonfires which magically protected them against disease and ensured their fertility. The harvest commenced with Lughnasa, and the grazing season ended with Samhain. Of these festivals, Imbolc has become reinterpreted with the feast of St. Brigid; Beltaine and Samhain, known today as May Day and Allhallows respectively, have remained almost untouched by Christianity and are observed in Inis Beag; but Lughnasa has disappeared from island tradition. Lughnasa still is celebrated in many parts of Ireland and is the subject of a monumental folklore study—Maire MacNeill's *The Festival of Lughnasa*; until the introduction of early potatoes into Inis Beag, harvesting commenced on this day, but any other practices associated with Lughnasa were abandoned long ago. Minor pagan festivals have become reinterpreted with Whitsuntide and the feasts of St. John, St. Martin, and St. Stephen, all of which are observed in Inis Beag.

Brigid, the most renowned of Irish female saints, was a cowherd and therefore is associated with cattle and with flowers, such as the dandelion, which nourish young lambs in the spring. On the last day of January, a small "Brigid's Cross" is fashioned from straw in each household of Inis Beag, and is thrust into the thatching at the end of the feast day. Crosses once were made from rushes, wood, metal, and even paper, and it is possible to determine the age of a thatched cottage being dismantled or renovated by counting the number of crosses salvaged from the straw debris. The Celts worshipped the sun whose symbol was the swastika, and the Brigid's Cross takes this form. It is a charm which protects the house (and the byre on the mainland) and those within it from harm, especially by fire, during the year. At the beginning of this century, a destitute woman who lived alone used to go from door to door begging for food and carrying a large "Brigid's Doll" made of straw and dressed immaculately in white with a picture of the saint on its breast. Some of the folk pulled straw from the doll to manufacture their crosses. After the woman recited the following poem, she was presented with food in honor of the saint, for which she blessed each person in the household with the doll:

Here comes Brigid	She is deaf and
Dressed in white.	She is dumb.
Give her something	For God's sake,
For the night.	Give her some.

Today, small groups of girls travel about the island emulating their predecessor by begging for coins to buy candy and donate to the church. A Brigid's Doll dressed in confirmation garb is carried by the leader of each group, and is used to confer blessings after the girls have recited in unison the two verses.

May Eve and Allhallows' Eve are both times when it is dangerous to go out of doors alone at night or be abroad after midnight, for the "big fellow" roams the back of the island, and everywhere pagan fairies, witches, vindictive ghosts, and the dog of the tumulus search for human victims. The safety of cattle is of particular concern to the folk on May Eve, and a common practice is to attach to the horn or tail of a cow a cloth containing a piece of iron which has

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feel that sexual intercourse is debilitating, and they will desist from it the night before they are to perform tasks which will require the expenditure of great energy. Women are approached sexually neither during menstruation nor for at least six months after childbirth, for they are considered "dangerous" to the male at these times. Returned Yanks have been denounced from the pulpit for describing American sexual mores to local youths, and such "pornographic" magazines as *Time* and *Life*, mailed home by relatives from abroad, have aroused curates to spirited sermon and instruction.

Male masturbation seems to be common in Inis Beag (sometimes called the major "escape valve" for frustration in Ireland), but premarital coitus is unknown and marital copulation is limited as to foreplay and the manner of consummation. Elders proudly insist that premarital sexual activities of any sort do not occur in the island, but male youths admit to it in rumor. The claims of young men focus on "petting" with tourists and a few local girls, whom the bolder of them kiss and handle outside of their clothing. Inis Beag girls, it is held by their lovers, do not confess these sins because they fail to experience pleasure from the contact; the male perpetrators also shun the confessional because of their fear of the curate. Absolute privacy at night is sought by married couples when they copulate, and foreplay is limited to kissing and rough fondling of the lower body of the woman, especially her buttocks. Sexual activity invariably is initiated by the husband, and the wife is usually totally passive. Only the male superior position is employed, and intercourse takes place with underclothes not fully removed; orgasm for the man is achieved quickly, after which he falls asleep almost immediately. Whenever I talked with males of sexual practices other than those just described, my remarks were met with disbelief, or I was accused of "codding" my listeners.

Many kinds of behavior disassociated from sex in other societies, such as nudity and physiological evacuation, are considered sexual in Inis Beag. We have noted elsewhere the fear of nudity—which precludes washing the body and bathing in the sea—and the secrecy surrounding the acts of urination and defecation and the use of human manure as fertilizer and cow dung as fuel. The sexual symbolism of nudity not only has resulted in the drowning of seamen who might have saved themselves had they been able to swim, but in the death of men who were unwilling to face the nurse when ill, because it might mean baring their bodies to her, and thus were beyond help when finally treated. An island nurse confided to me that she was physically assaulted by the mother of a young man for diagnosing his illness in the mother's absence and bathing his chest as the woman entered his bedroom. Even the nudity of household pets can arouse anxiety, especially when they are sexually aroused during time of heat. In some cottages, dogs are whipped for licking their genitals and soon learn to indulge in this behavior outside when unobserved.

Hypochondria and depression in Inis Beag are inextricably linked, in that the former composes part of the syndrome of the latter; and just as sexual puritanism is undergirded by masochism, so are these two traits. Little more need be said about the causes of depression among the folk, other than to bring together factors which have been discussed earlier: the extent to which their lives are circumscribed by the will of the priest and other figures of authority; their poverty

to "our man") be chosen for the task. Earlier, according to island opinion, the same priest had caused to be committed to the "madhouse" a local man who publicly challenged certain of his actions. The unfortunate man was released six months later, as per law, since he was not mentally ill.

Sexual misconceptions are myriad in Inis Beag. The islanders share with most Western peoples the belief that men by nature are far more libidinous than women. The latter have been taught by some curates and in the home that sexual relations with their husbands are a "duty" which must be "endured," for to refuse coitus is a mortal sin. A frequently encountered assertion affixes the guilt for male sexual strivings on the enormous intake of potatoes of the Inis Beag male. (In Nigeria, among the people whom my wife and I studied, women are thought to be more sexually disposed than men and are the repositories of sexual knowledge; it is they who initiate coitus and so pose a threat to their spouses. Nigerian men place the blame on clitoridectomy performed just prior to marriage.) Asked to compare the sexual proclivities of Inis Beag men and women, one mother of nine said, "Men can wait a long time before wanting 'it,' but we can wait a lot longer." There is much evidence to indicate that the female orgasm is unknown—or at [redacted]oubted, or considered a deviant response. One middle-aged bache[redacted]o considers himself wise in the ways of the outside world and has a [redacted]putation for making love to willing tourists, described one girl's violent bodily reactions to his fondling and asked for an explanation; when told the "facts of life" of what obviously was an orgasm, he admitted not realizing that women also could achieve a climax, although he was aware that some of them apparently enjoyed kissing and being handled.

Inis Beag men feel that sexual intercourse is debilitating, a common belief in primitive and folk societies. They will desist from sex the night before they are to perform a job which will require the expenditure of great energy. Women are not approached sexually during menstruation or for months after childbirth, since they are considered "dangerous" to the male at these times. Returned "Yanks" have been denounced from the pulpit for describing American sexual practices to island youths, and such "pornographic" magazines as *Time* and *Life*, mailed by kin from abroad, have aroused curates to spirited sermon and instruction.

The separation of the sexes, started within the family, is augmented by separation in almost all segments of adolescent and adult activity. Boys and girls are separated to some extent in classrooms, and completely in